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Nation Two Not-So-Perfect Spies

Ronald Pelton is convicted of espionage as Jonathan Pollard pleads guilty

Both had been middling bureaucrats, toiling in obscurity in the vast U.S. intelligence network. Seven months ago, just four days apart, they became infamous, arrested as spies. Ronald Pelton was accused of selling top-secret information to a hostile adversary, the Soviet Union. Jonathan Pollard was charged with peddling U.S. secrets to a trusted ally, Israel. Pelton spied for the sake of financial gain. Pollard for political as well as pecuniary motives. Last week their fates converged once again. In Baltimore, a federal jury convicted Pelton on four counts of an indictment that included conspiracy and espionage. In Washington, Pollard pleaded guilty to one count of conspiring to commit espionage in an attempt to gain leniency for his wife and accomplice, Anne Henderson-Pollard, who copped a plea to lesser charges.

With last week's conviction, Pelton's case is effectively closed. He joins a dreary list of eight other Americans charged with spying for the Soviets in the past two years. A onetime \$24,500-a-year analyst for the supersecret National Security Agency, Pelton admitted to earning \$35,000 plus up to \$5,000 in expense money for providing the Soviets with details of the NSA's electronic eavesdropping and code-breaking operations over a five-year period. He could be sentenced to three life terms in prison.

The Pollard incident, however, could prove to be a continuing strain between the U.S. and Israel. Federal prosecutors named four Israeli citizens as Pollard's co-conspirators, including a high-ranking military officer, a veteran of Israeli intelligence and a science attaché. Though the four have not been indicted, U.S. Attorney Joseph diGenova said they were subjects of "an ongoing and continuing criminal investigation." As part of his plea bargain, Pollard, a former analyst for the Naval Investigative Service, is cooperating with the inquiry.

Israel prohibits spying against the U.S., and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres has claimed that Pollard was controlled by a small group acting without official approval. But as Pollard appeared in court, the Justice Department issued a detailed account of his espionage activities. It strongly suggests the existence of a broader operation, and it shows that Pollard believed his activities were sanctioned by the Israeli government.

According to federal prosecutors, Pollard met Israeli Air Force Colonel Aviam

Sella through a mutual associate in the spring of 1984. A passionately pro-Zionist Jew, Pollard did not need persuading to become a spy: he readily offered to betray his country. Although his job with naval intelligence involved research on potential terrorist threats in the U.S. and the Caribbean, Pollard assured Sella he could obtain signal intelligence and technical data that would be of interest to the Israeli defense forces. After he produced several classified documents at their next meeting, Sella recruited him on the spot.

Sella, a brilliant young officer who reputedly planned the successful Israeli air attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad in June 1981, instructed Pollard and his wife to visit Paris that summer. There the American spy met Yosef Yagur, the attaché for scientific affairs at the Israeli consulate in New York City, and Rafi Eitan, a controversial intelligence officer who helped kidnap Nazi Adolf Eichmann in Argentina in 1960 and abduct him to Israel for trial. Eitan had served under former Prime Ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir as a special adviser on counterterrorism, and was then running Israel's Liaison Bureau for Scientific Affairs. Known by its Hebrew acronym, LAKAM, the agency was charged with gathering secret scientific and technological data.

Back in the U.S., Pollard received instructions from Yagur and a man identified in court papers last week only as "Uzi." Yagur, the Justice Department says, instructed Pollard on how to deliver the top-secret material. About three times a week, Pollard pinched classified national-defense documents from his office. For secrecy's sake, he would sometimes drive through a car wash while transferring the papers to a special briefcase. Approximately every two weeks, Pollard delivered the goods to the apartment of Irit Erb, a secretary at the Israeli embassy in Washington. Papers Pollard would be held accountable for were photocopied and returned.

U.S. officials have said that the pilfered documents concerned the military capabilities of Arab countries such as Jordan and Egypt. But a knowledgeable Israeli source told TIME last week that Pollard "was selling the Israelis everything he could get his hands on. The range was unbelievable—from U.S. Navy cipher keys to breakdowns of the strength of the Saudi air force."

Pollard's paymasters were grateful for

his services. In his 18 months as a spy, the Justice Department says, his monthly stipend was raised from \$1,500 to \$2,500, and he was given \$20,000 in cash for expenses on two trips to Europe and Israel. Pollard's contacts even bought an expensive diamond-and-sapphire ring for his wife. Investigators believe that Pollard received a total of more than \$45,000 for his work. Pollard was told that if he spied for nine more years, he could move to Israel under the assumed name of Danny Cohen. The Israelis showed Pollard a passport with his future alias, the Justice Department said, and had set up a numbered foreign bank account in the same name. The account contained \$30,000, his handlers said, a sum that would grow to \$300,000 over the next decade.

FBI agents confronted Pollard last November after co-workers reported that the analyst had been taking home classified papers. During a break in his interrogation, Pollard phoned his wife and used the code word cactus to alert her that he was in danger. Frantically, Anne Henderson-Pollard stashed a suitcase full of documents under a staircase in their apartment building, asking a neighbor to pick up the bag and meet her at a hotel later. The suspicious neighbor instead called the Naval Investigative Service which, in turn, contacted the FBI. A few days later, Pollard and his wife drove to the Israeli embassy building in Washington, seeking political asylum. The embassy turned them away, and the Pollards were colared just outside the gate by FBI agents.

The day after Pollard's arrest, Yagur returned to Israel; Erb had left the U.S. 48 hours earlier. After hedging at first, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres apologized for the incident and said his government would investigate the matter. Eitan was retired from intelligence and LAKAM dismantled.

Questions remain about official Israeli complicity in the Pollard case. Although Eitan and Sella were accused of participating in a rogue spying operation, neither was punished: Eitan is now the chairman of the board of Israel Chemicals, the country's leading petrochemical concern, while Sella has been appointed commander of the Ramon airbase in the Negev desert. Moreover, FBI Director William Webster told the New York Times last week that Israel had offered only "selective cooperation" to U.S. investigators. Many U.S. officials believe that Pollard's

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recruitment was not known exclusively within LAKAM. "It was done with the full blessing of the Israeli intelligence community," says a top-ranking American official. Israel, however, continues to dispute such allegations. General Amnon Shabak, head of Israeli military intelligence, maintained last week that his organization "has no part whatsoever in the Pollard affair." He added, "We have excellent cooperation with the U.S. in the field of intelligence, and I can only hope this affair is behind us."

Pollard's court appearance came at a time when the Israeli government was also trying to cope with an intelligence scandal at home. Senior officers in Israel's domestic intelligence service, the Shin Bet, have alleged that the organization's director covered up the execution of a pair of Palestinian bus hijackers two years ago. Israel's citizens and friends are starting to wonder if its secret services have veered out of control or if immoral acts are being dealt with responsibly in the upper echelons of the government.

If the Pollard case raised disturbing questions about the U.S.-Israeli relationship, the Pelton conviction was a triumphant demonstration of the Reagan Administration's determination to prosecute spies without compromising vital secrets in the process. "We knew in advance that if we prosecuted Pelton, we might be forced to disclose more in court than we intended," said a top-ranking Administration official. "But during the trial nothing has been lost or compromised."

Throughout the trial, CIA Director William Casey and NSA Director William Odom had admonished news organizations to be circumspect in reporting on the implications of Pelton's disclosures. Trial Judge Herbert Murray also cautioned the jurors about discussing their deliberations or revealing secret information. The jurors heard classified portions of wire-tapped conversations between Pelton and his Soviet contacts, and saw a map that Pelton drew for the FBI estimating the location of a U.S. eavesdropping operation against the Soviet Union. But public testimony at the trial was limited to cryptic identification of U.S. operations by letters of the alphabet. Even Pelton's testimony was interrupted at times when he seemed about to mention classified information.

Federal Prosecutor John Douglass was pleased with the Pelton trial. "I think it was an excellent example of what you can do," said he. "when the Department of Justice and the Department of Defense take time to get together and carefully prepare a case." If such cooperation can produce more successful prosecutions like the two last week, it may convince a few would-be spies that there is little real profit in espionage.

—By Jacob V. Lamar Jr.
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